

Author (Interviewer) Brown Meredith Christian  
Full Name Last First Middle  
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Full Name Last First Middle  
Known by any other names? (list) Rochelle Brown  
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Geographic Places as Subjects within the interview:

<u>AR</u>	<u>USA</u>	<u>Various</u>	<u>Various</u>
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Title	Last Name	First	Middle	DOB

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adulthood, and more

## **Interview with Rochelle Brown**

**Meredith Brown- 3/11/12**

Rochelle Brown has lived in Arkansas her whole life and has seen many changes take place in the state as she has lived here. This interview includes information about her childhood in Harrison, her life in Searcy as a student at Harding University, and her life as a young adult to present day in Fort Smith. Anyone looking to see what Harding was like in the 80s would be interested in this interview. Anyone wondering how the education system in Fort Smith has changed would be interested in this interview. There are many stories told here that could be useful for people looking for glimpses of someone's childhood.

## Oral Interview

**Me:** Hi. My name is Meredith Brown and this is my Arkansas history oral interview. First I'd like to start by asking "What's your name and how long have you lived in Arkansas?"

**Rochelle Brown:** My name is Rochelle Brown and I'm almost 51 years old, so I've lived in Arkansas my whole life.

**Me:** Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like growing up in Harrison?

**Rochelle Brown:** Yes, I grew up in Harrison Arkansas which is in Boone County. I actually wasn't born there. I was born in West Memphis in Crittenden County. But my dad worked for the highway department, so we moved around a lot, but most of my years have been spent in Boone County. Harrison is a small town and when I grew up there it was a small close knit community. Actually the month before I was born there was a big flood in Harrison and the banks of Crooked Creek broke and came over and destroyed a lot of the building in downtown Harrison and they were rebuilt and that happened right before I was born. Harrison at that time was an all white community. Lots of families that had been there for years and just a small town feel. Everyone knew at least someone in everyone's family and it was a really great place to grow up.

**Me:** Can you tell us a little bit about your school life as a child and any family stories or Christmas memories or just daily life and what that was like?

**Rochelle Brown:** Ok, I went to elementary school at Forrest Heights in Harrison. Back in those days kindergarten wasn't required and so I did not attend kindergarten I started first grade at Forrest Heights lots of good memories there lots of good friends. Actually one of my friends who started first grade with me in Mrs. Griffin's first grade classroom with me in Forrest Heights actually graduated from high school with me and graduated in 1983 with me at Harding, so we went all the way through our schooling together. Just one of my friends. We lived close to that school when I was in fifth and sixth grade I actually walked to school and then we moved a little farther away and I rode the bus to school all through junior high and high school until my senior year I had a car and I was finally allowed to drive to school. One of my memories from sixth grade is that we were all shooting rubber bands. Everyone in the class was shooting rubber bands. And one day our teacher had had enough and she stepped out and told the principal, who happened to be her husband, and he came in and said that if you had ever shot a rubber band line up. And so there were two boys who lied and said they had never done it and they were sent out of the room and everyone else in the classroom lined up and got a swat from the principal that day! So, things were a little different than they are now. My family had some land. We had horses and cattle in Western Grove which is just south of Harrison in Newton County. And we went there a lot after school, sometimes after dinner we would go down there to work on the

farm, or to feed the cows, or to fix a fence, or to visit my grandparents who lived down there too. So, I have a lot of memories down there in Newton County as well.

**Me:** What's it like going back to your hometown now as an adult and how have you seen the town change?

**Rochelle Brown:** Well, the biggest change in going back to Harrison now is that just last year Boone County voted and became a wet county. Which means now they sell alcohol and the whole time I grew up it was dry county. So, that's the biggest change. Branson's success has trickled down to Harrison and so it's grown quite a bit. Many more outsiders live there now than when I was there. Harrison is more racially diverse now than it was then. Just not as many as the same families around, I think.

**Me:** Ok.

**Rochelle Brown:** I thought of another story from growing up!

**Me:** Oh! Share. Please share!

**Rochelle Brown:** It seemed like it snowed a lot in Harrison back in those days and we all liked to sled. We had different kinds of sleds for the different kinds of snow. It seemed we missed a lot of school. But my senior year, In January of probably '79, we had a big snow and I think we missed a whole week of school. And we even went out to the golf course and slid down the hill at the golf course. Lots of kids from school would meet us out there. They would drive in jeeps and get out there and we would sled on runner sleds or disc sleds, but our favorite thing to go down the big hill was a tractor tire inner tube. And we could get as many as five people on that! Lots of fun sledding!

**Me:** So you mentioned you went to Harding for college and I was wondering if you could tell a little bit about what that was like and Searcy during the late 70s early 80s?

**Rochelle Brown:** Ok, I started Harding fall of '79 and the biggest difference was they had just that year become Harding University; it had been Harding College before that. The Benson was almost ready to open. The first semester I was there we had more than one chapel and we had to have it in the Admin Auditorium. And the biggest deal then was that girls had to wear dresses to classes. And so not only did we wear dresses we wore heels and hose. No one would go bare legged like they do now. Everyone wore hose and heels and it was real hassle, especially on rainy days. That rule was in effect until it snowed and I'll just say that when I lived in Cathcart one night it started snowing and all the girls were leaning out over the courtyard between Stephens and Cathcart, still do, and everyone was looking up at the snow coming down and everyone was cheering and someone yelled "We can wear pants tomorrow!" And then everyone gave up this big cheer! So, that was kind of funny. And sure enough in chapel the next day they told us we could wear pants until they made us go back and the first sign of warm weather they

announced in chapel again we had to go back to wearing dresses and we did. The second year I was there, the same thing. We had to wear dresses and then when it started getting cold they announced we could wear pants and we did and then they never changed it back after that. That was the spring of '81. They never changed the rule back and after that we could wear jeans to class. No one could wear shorts anywhere on campus. Even when we played softball, when we played racquetball, whatever, went running, whatever. We all played in sweat pants or jeans. It was not comfortable. The guys wore football pants a lot or sweat pants and no one ever died of a heat stroke. It was just fine! Let's see? What else? I think there were a lot more practical jokes maybe on campus then there are now. I told Meredith when she first went to Harding she couldn't do as many jokes as we did because of security cameras everywhere. We didn't have those when I was there. Lots of practical jokes. A couple of my favorites while I was there was that someone actually stole the arch that says "Harding College" [they] sat up there late and night and would loosen one bolt at a time until they finally got them all loosened and they loaded it up and hid it in a barn somewhere and it was later returned. That was one of my favorites and another one of my favorites was all the songbooks from the Benson Auditorium disappeared one day! We went to chapel and there were no songbooks. They made several pleas for them to be returned to no avail. Dr. Ganus was the president of the school then and no one would return the songbooks so they kind of threatened us saying we would just have to sing camp songs and songs from memory until they are returned and so that's what we did for a long time and finally, I believe, it was Gerald Ford who was coming to speak in the American Studies program. When the Secret Service came before his appearance they swept the building, they swept the auditorium and they looked in every nook and cranny to make sure the president was safe they found the songbooks stacked on the other side of the wall in the ladies' restroom. The people had moved the ceiling tiles and stacked them over behind the wall and then put the ceiling tiles back and so they were found and I thought that was a pretty good joke. Of course when I was there there was no such thing as the internet. We did all of our research in the library using real books and we also used microfilm and microfiche. We'd go over and scan the periodicals on those things that was really like film on reels and we'd put it on these machines and reel through so we could get information. A lot of our papers then we were able to turn in handwritten and those we didn't want to hand write we could type. Some people, my roommate had a typewriter. So we could turn in some typewritten papers. Curfew when I started, for the girls, was 10:30 on weeknights and the boys actually had 'til 11:00 which was not fair. Later they did change it to make it the same time. But the boys had until 11:00 and girls had until 10:30 and I think on weekends everyone's was 12:00 on weekends. The boys could always get away with being late easier than the girls could. I think that's still true today. I lived in Cathcart my first year. My second and third year I lived in the dorm now called Sears, at that time it was New Dorm. While I lived there they actually gave it the name and I watched the ceremony from my room down below and saw them dedicate it and name it Sears. My last year I lived in a house, a campus house, with five other girls. It's gone now. It's just a parking lot where the house was, but it was called Jones House and really enjoyed living in that house my senior year! The student

center has been all redone. When I was there there actually was a bowling ally in the student center, but no one ever went bowling there. But there was a bowling ally there and they did have some video games in there and we did go in there sometimes to play Pac-Man or Mrs. Pac-Man, but we never bowled.

**Me:** Anything else you've noticed change in the town of Searcy in the time that you...?

**Rochelle Brown:** Well, everything was on Race Street. There was no such thing as Beebe Capps. Everything was on Race Street including Frozen Delight, now I know that's over closet to campus. Frozen D's is what we called it and it was really just a greasy spoon on Race and we loved it! We ate at Wendy's a lot. There was a McDonald's but we didn't go there often. There was an A&W close to campus and we would walk up there, it's not there anymore., we would walk up and get root beers at A&W. We went to movies at the Rialto.

**Me:** Do you remember how much it cost to go to a movie at the Rialto?

**Rochelle Brown:** I do not remember, but I think the first semester I went to Harding it was \$69 an hour. A credit hour.

**Me:** I mean to go to the movies at the Rialto...?

**Rochelle Brown:** I know. I said I don't remember how much it cost to go to the movies, but Harding cost.

**Me:** Oh..

**Rochelle Brown:** I think \$69 a semester hour when I started.

**Me:** Sorry, I was confused for a second!

**Rochelle Brown:** I think I confused you...that's ok. Anyway, oh, how we wish it was still \$69 an hour!

**Me:** Ok, well, can you tell us a little bit about what it was like when you moved to Fort Smith as an adult compared to now, what it's like?

**Rochelle Brown:** Ok. When I moved here I lived in an apartment, of course, and the only person I knew was the man who had hired me to work at Metro Christian School. I had interviewed with him. He came to Harding to interview and I was hoping to go to Dallas and get a job, but he moved to Fort Smith and hired me to come work here. It was a real blessing! Got involved with the church here, the West-Ark Church, made lots of friends, so it was a good thing. I love living in Fort Smith. Taught school at this little private Christian school. Some of my first students, they were second graders then, are in there mid 30s now, so it's been a while! The town has changed quite a bit. We have a convention center in Fort Smith now we didn't have when I moved here. Shopping is a better. We have a lot of national chains now we didn't

have when I first moved here. Roads are better and lots of new housing developments. One of the exciting things for Fort Smith we are working on getting a Federal Marshall's museum built here in Fort Smith and it's going to be built down on the river downtown. There has been a lot of effort in cleaning up the downtown area and refurbishing some things down there. Fort Smith is a town full of history, Old West history, so we try to capitalize on that and our tourism, a lot of tourism, is built on that. So the Marshall museum is to be built soon. Fort Chaffee, hundreds and hundreds of acres that was a military base, but now it's not used so much for that. They've sold some of it to private businesses, there's some housing going up, there's a plan for a new Fort Smith high school out there, there's a new nature center out there, so the Fort Chaffee area is really growing. There's a new interstate coming through right there, so that's a big change. Whirlpool and OK Foods have always been major employers in this area and Whirlpool continues to close down a lot of their lines and send their jobs to Mexico while OK Foods doesn't employ as many as they used to employ and they recently have actually sold OK Foods to a Mexican company. So, those are a couple of things that are very different then when I moved here.

**Me:** Can you tell a little bit about...I know you recently started teaching again. Can you tell a little bit about what it was like teaching then versus what it's like teaching now in today's society?

**Rochelle Brown:** Well, like I said I taught in a small Christian school and we actually got to spend our time teaching the kids. We had a lot of fun activities and we had a lot of parental support and therefore the children for the most part were well disciplined and eager to learn and they did learn and we had a lot of fun at school. I've gone back and I'm working in public school now. The loads and loads of paperwork that teachers have to fill out today just for information and then the incredible work they have to do on their lesson plans. We've always had to do lesson plans, but they haven't always had to be aligned with Arkansas frameworks and SLE's. It's just a lot more complicated than it used to be to even do your lesson plans. Parental support is not like it used to be. Used to be mom, dad, and the teacher all on one side against the kid and now it's mom, dad, and the kid against the teacher a lot of the times. There's just less respect for the profession of teaching, I think. In some places the teachers are more concerned with the scores they make on their benchmark tests than if the kids are actually learning or not. More emphasis is even put on the ACT and SAT scores than 30 years ago. Technology is huge! Like I said we didn't have computers when I started teaching and now much of the teaching revolves around technology. A lot more broken homes now than 30 years ago so that makes it a lot more complicated when trying to communicate with parents and make a plan for the children.

**Me:** Can you tell a little bit about what it was like to raise children in Fort Smith?

**Rochelle Brown:** I think Fort Smith has been a great place to raise children! It's not a tiny place, but it's not a city actually. Both of our daughters were born at Saint Edward's Mercy Medical Center and as they grew up we looked at other schools, private schools and public



schools, and we chose private schools for our daughters. They've attended Christian schools all the way through. Fort Smith public schools are very good schools and they have a reputation for being very good schools. They deliver good education to the public. Lots of good things, but we chose Christian schools for our daughters because we wanted their teachers to be believers in God and we wanted their teachers to reinforce moral values that we have and beliefs. We wanted that reinforced at school and we wanted them to gain a Biblical world view through the curriculum and education. So that's why we chose private school. Some of our friends have homeschooled their kids and I think all three are viable options and it's just that we chose the private school route. Our girls participated in sports, made good friends, lifetime friends I think, that they will have even 20 and 30 years from now that they made at school.

**Me:** Not so much about Arkansas history, but I was wondering if you had any memories about the day JFK was shot and assassinated? I think I've heard you mention something about it before...

**Rochelle Brown:** Yes, it actually may be my first memory. I'm not sure because I would have been very, very young. I don't remember a lot of details...I think I was only two. I don't remember a lot of details, but I do remember it being on television a lot and I remember my mom crying a lot. I remember her pointing things out to me that was going on the television and crying. Of course if I was two she was all of 20. Anyway it was sad. I also remember his funeral. Everyone has seen the picture of John-John in his little coat saluting at his father's funeral. I do remember my mother saying to me "That little boy is just about your age." I think he was a year older than me, maybe? I guess that made an impression on me when I was two. I don't know! I do have some memories of that, so likely they are my first memories.

**Me:** Cool! I was wondering if you had any other memories of Arkansas or anything that's stuck out to you. Stories.

**Rochelle Brown:** Winter of '93, December of '93, Arkansas's basketball team was incredibly successful. Everyone wanted to go to any game possible and if you ever got tickets it was a green light to go. They were hard to come by and everyone wanted to go! Over the Christmas break of '93 we had a couple of tickets and my sister and I got to go to Fayetteville and we drove over from Harrison, where we were actually visiting our mom. The weather was bad! It was spitting snow, it was kind of sleeting. My sister was great with child...it was late December and she delivered early February. She had a great big pregnant belly and we had to park far away and we wore big coats. We knew we had to be there early because President Clinton was going to be attending that ball game and they had warned us about security. So we parked far away and had to walk in the cold all the way up that hill, like I said the weather was bad, and once we got up to Bud Walton we had to stand in line outside so they could check our bags and we could go through metal detectors so the place could be safe for when Clinton got there. We were not fans of President Clinton, never the less when he came in it was kind of cool to say that you've seen a sitting president. I didn't like having to go through all that security, but I saw the need for

it and respected that. Like I said, I didn't agree with his politics, but it was cool to have a president from Arkansas and then to actually have him at the ball game while he was president. So that was kind of cool! Also, that makes me think of when I was in high school and he was running for governor. He was making the rounds and he actually came to my high school and made a speech and at that point in time I was not really aware of politics and all I know is that all the girls in my high school thought he was incredibly good looking and that he should probably make a wonderful governor because he was so cute. [Laughs] Times have changed!

**Me:** He's not so attractive anymore!

**Rochelle Brown:** No!

**Me:** As we close I was wondering if you have a favorite Arkansan.

**Rochelle Brown:** I don't know that I have a favorite Arkansan. When I was in high school a family moved to Harrison from California and their kids told up "People think we are moving to a state where people are barefoot and pregnant all the time and smoke corn cob pipes and live on the sides of hills." Literally, they really truly believe that they were living to a state of hillbillies. I think people like Don Tyson and Sam Walton have obviously put Arkansas on the map as far as globally. People know that Arkansas is not just a place where hillbillies live, but that a lot of good things happen here. When I grew up the nickname for Arkansas was "The Land of Opportunity" and later they changed it to "The Natural State" and I think our lakes, our mountains, our hiking trails, all of that bring tourists to the state and I think that's the great thing about our state! Those men, I think, have done a lot for Arkansas. Corliss Williamson played, grew up in Russellville and then he played for Arkansas and then he played professional basketball for years and now he's back in the state and I think he has made a good name for himself. So we're proud of Corliss, too! It's disappointing that we often find ourselves at the bottom of the list of states for health and education. You know that's always disappointing, but you know we're a poor state with lots of rural areas and we're getting better! We're getting better. Generations of my family have lived here in this state. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Like I said I've lived here almost 51 years and I love this state. I think it's beautiful!

**Me:** Awesome! Any final thoughts?

**Rochelle Brown:** I could call the Hogs, but I won't! [Laughs]

**Me:** I don't think so! We already had to do that once in class! So I think we got that covered!

**Rochelle Brown:** Ok!

**Me:** Thank you for your time and appreciate it a lot.

**Rochelle Brown:** Well, I hope it's good for you!